Examples from The Crucible

Conflict quotes:

Internal conflict

Hale ‘I may shut my conscience to it no more- private vengeance is working through this testimony!’ pg. 91

‘I denounce these proceedings. I quit this court’ pg. 96

‘I have sought a Christian way, for damnation’s doubled on a minister who counsels men to lie’

‘There is blood on my head!’

Proctor ‘Woman. I’ll not have your suspicion any more’ pg. 44

‘I have known her, sir, I have known her’ pg. 88

Proctor struggles with his pride and sense of ‘goodness’.

‘Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!’

‘He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!’ Elizabeth about John. Closing words of the play.

Ideological conflict

Danforth vs Proctor

‘You must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between.’ Danforth

‘God does not need my name nailed to the church door’ Proctor

‘You will sign your name or it is no confession’ Danforth

‘I can not judge another’ Proctor

‘Why, it is a lie, it is a lie; how may I damn myself? I cannot, I cannot’ Rebecca will not confess, she is a believer

Interpersonal conflict

Abigail vs. Proctor

‘A man may think God sleeps, but God sees everything, I know it now. I beg you, sir, I beg you—see her what she is. . . . She thinks to dance with me on my wife’s grave! And well she might, for I thought of her softly. God help me, I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat. But it is a whore’s vengeance. . . .’ Proctor

‘Ah, you’re wicked yet, aren’t y’!’ Proctor

‘I will cut off my hand before I’ll reach for you again’ Proctor

Abigail vs Elizabeth Proctor

‘It’s a bitter woman, a lying, cold, snivelling woman’ Abby about Elizabeth

‘Goody Proctor is a gossiping liar’

Hysteria

Another critical theme in *The Crucible* is the role that hysteria can play in tearing apart a community. Hysteria supplants logic and enables people to believe that their neighbors, whom they have always considered upstanding people, are committing absurd and unbelievable crimes—communing with the devil, killing babies, and so on. In *The Crucible,* the townsfolk accept and become active in the hysterical climate not only out of genuine religious piety but also because it gives them a chance to express repressed sentiments and to act on long-held grudges. The most obvious case is Abigail, who uses the situation to accuse Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft and have her sent to jail. But others thrive on the hysteria as well: Reverend Parris strengthens his position within the village, albeit temporarily, by making scapegoats of people like Proctor who question his authority. The wealthy, ambitious Thomas Putnam gains revenge on Francis Nurse by getting Rebecca, Francis’s virtuous wife, convicted of the supernatural murders of Ann Putnam’s babies. In the end, hysteria can thrive only because people benefit from it. It suspends the rules of daily life and allows the acting out of every dark desire and hateful urge under the cover of righteousness.

**Reputation**

Reputation is tremendously important in theocratic Salem, where public and private moralities are one and the same. In an environment where reputation plays such an important role, the fear of guilt by association becomes particularly pernicious. Focused on maintaining public reputation, the townsfolk of Salem must fear that the sins of their friends and associates will taint their names. Various characters base their actions on the desire to protect their respective reputations. As the play begins, Parris fears that Abigail’s increasingly questionable actions, and the hints of witchcraft surrounding his daughter’s coma, will threaten his reputation and force him from the pulpit. Meanwhile, the protagonist, John Proctor, also seeks to keep his good name from being tarnished. Early in the play, he has a chance to put a stop to the girls’ accusations, but his desire to preserve his reputation keeps him from testifying against Abigail. At the end of the play, however, Proctor’s desire to keep his good name leads him to make the heroic choice not to make a false confession and to go to his death without signing his name to an untrue statement. “I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” he cries to Danforth in Act IV. By refusing to relinquish his name, he redeems himself for his earlier failure and dies with integrity.

Loyalty

Giles Corey is pressed to death to save his land for his sons ‘More weight’- in the play Elizabeth tells Proctor, we don’t actually see it happen.

*Extra analysis of ‘The Crucible’*

*The Crucible* is a play about the intersection of private sins with paranoia, hysteria, and religious intolerance. The citizens of Arthur Miller’s Salem of 1692 would consider the very concept of a private life heretical. The government of Salem, and of Massachusetts as a whole, is a theocracy, with the legal system based on the Christian Bible. Moral laws and state laws are one and the same; sin and the status of an individual’s soul are public concerns. An individual’s private life must conform to the moral laws, or the individual represents a threat to the public good.

Regulating the morality of citizens requires surveillance. For every inhabitant of Salem, there is a potential witness to the individual’s private crimes. State officials patrol the township, requiring citizens to give an account of their activities. Free speech is not a protected right, and saying the wrong thing can easily land a citizen in jail. Most of the punishments, such as the stocks, whipping, and hangings, are public, with the punishment serving to shame the lawbreaker and remind the public that to disagree with the state’s decisions is to disagree with God’s will.

*The Crucible* introduces a community full of underlying personal grudges. Religion pervades every aspect of life, but it is a religion that lacks a ritual outlet to manage emotions such as anger, jealousy, or resentment. By 1692, Salem has become a fairly established community, removed from its days as an outpost on a hostile frontier. Many of the former dangers that united the community in its early years have lessened, while interpersonal feuds and grudges over property, religious offices, and sexual behavior have begun to simmer beneath the theocratic surface. These tensions, combined with the paranoia about supernatural forces, pervade the town’s religious sensibility and provide the raw materials for the hysteria of the witch trials.

On the surface, Parris appears to be an anxious, worried father. However, if we pay close attention to his language, we find indications that he is mainly worried about his reputation, not the welfare of his daughter and their friends. He fears that Abigail, Betty, and the other girls were engaging in witchcraft when he caught them dancing, and his first concern is not the endangerment of their souls but the trouble that the scandal will cause him. It is possible—and likely, from his point of view—that members in the community would make use of a moral transgression to ruin him. Parris’s anxiety about the insecurity of his office reveals the extent to which conflicts divide the Salem community. Not even those individuals who society believes are invested with God’s will can control the whim of the populace.

The idea of guilt by association is central to the events in *The Crucible,* as it is one of the many ways in which the private, moral behavior of citizens can be regulated. An individual must fear that the sins of his or her friends and associates will taint his or her own name. Therefore, the individual is pressured to govern his or her private relationships according to public opinion and public law. To solidify one’s good name, it is necessary to publicly condemn the wrongdoing of others. In this way, guilt by association also reinforces the publicization of private sins. Even before the play begins, Abigail’s increasingly questionable reputation, in light of her unexplained firing by the upright Elizabeth Proctor, threatens her uncle Parris’s tenuous hold on power and authority in the community. The allegations of witchcraft only render her an even greater threat to him.

Putnam, meanwhile, has his own set of grudges against his fellow Salemites. A rich man from an influential Salem family, he believes that his status grants him the right to worldly success. Yet he has been thwarted, both in his efforts to make his brother-in-law minister, and in his family life, where his children have all died in infancy. Putnam is well positioned to use the witch trials to express his feelings of persecution and undeserved failure, and to satisfy his need for revenge. His wife feels similarly wronged—like many Puritans, she is all too willing to blame the tragic deaths of her children on supernatural causes—and seeks similar retribution for what she perceives as the malevolent doings of others.

In a theocracy, part of the state’s role is policing belief. Therefore, there is a good deal of pressure on the average citizen to inform on the blasphemous speech of his or her neighbors in the name of Christian duty. Giles’s claim to Hale that Proctor does not believe in witches does not necessarily arise out of a desire to do his Christian duty—he may only be making a joke. However, the very offhand nature of his statement indicates that reporting a neighbor’s heretical words or thoughts is a deeply ingrained behavior in Salem.

[http://imagec10.247realmedia.com/RealMedia/ads/Creatives/default/empty.gif](http://oascentral.sparknotes.com/RealMedia/ads/click_lx.ads/www.sparknotes.com/lit/crucible/90109513/Middle2/default/empty.gif/796a4551416b7144617a494143766268?x)

Rebecca, a figure of respectability and good sense, fears that an investigation into witchcraft will only increase division within the Salem community. Parris’s declaration that a thorough investigation could get at the root of all the community’s problems proves accurate, though not in the way that he foresees. The witch trials do bring out all of the community’s problems, but in the worst possible way. The specter of witchcraft allows citizens to blame political failures, the deaths of children, and land squabbles on supernatural influences. No one has to accept individual responsibility for any of the conflicts that divide the community or confront any of his or her personal issues with other individuals because everyone can simply say, “The devil made me do it.”

Reverend Hale’s reaction to Giles’s story about Martha reveals the dangerous implications of a zealous witch-hunt. Ordinarily, reading books not related to the Bible would be considered an immoral use of one’s time, but it certainly would not be interpreted as evidence of witchcraft. But with Hale present and the scent of witchcraft in the air, the slightest unorthodox behavior automatically makes someone suspect.

Abigail’s reaction to the mounting pressure determines the way in which the rest of the witch trials will play out. Because she can no longer truly deny her involvement in witchcraft, she accepts her guilt but displaces it onto Tituba. She admits being involved in witchcraft but declares that Tituba forced her into it. Tituba’s reaction to being accused follows Abigail’s lead: she admits her guilt in a public setting and receives absolution and then completes her self-cleansing by passing her guilt on to others. In this manner, the admission of involvement with witchcraft functions like the ritual of confession.

The ritual of confession in the witch trials also allows the expression of sentiments that could not otherwise be verbalized in repressive Salem. By placing her own thoughts in the devil’s mouth, Tituba can express her long-held aggression against the man who enslaves her. Moreover, she states that the devil tempted her by showing her some white people that he owned. By naming the devil as a slave owner, she subtly accuses Parris and other white citizens of doing the devil’s work in condoning slavery. Tituba is normally a powerless figure; in the context of the witch trials, however, she gains a power and authority previously unknown to her. No one would have listened seriously to a word she had to say before, but she now has a position of authority from which to name the secret sins of other Salem residents. She uses that power and authority to make accusations that would have earned her a beating before. The girls—Abigail and Betty—follow the same pattern, empowering themselves through their allegedly religious hysteria.

Abigail and her troop have achieved an extremely unusual level of power and authority for young, unmarried girls in a Puritan community. They can destroy the lives of others with a mere accusation, and even the wealthy and influential are not safe. Mary Warren is so full of her newfound power that she feels able to defy Proctor’s assumption of authority over her. She invokes her own power as an official of the court, a power that Proctor cannot easily deny.

Proctor’s sense of guilt begins to eat away at him. He knows that he can bring down Abigail and end her reign of terror, but he fears for his good name if his hidden sin of adultery is revealed. The pressing knowledge of his own guilt makes him feel judged, but Elizabeth is correct when she points out that the judge who pursues him so mercilessly is himself. Proctor has a great loathing for hypocrisy, and, here, he judges his own hypocrisy no less harshly than that of others.

Proctor’s intense dilemma over whether to expose his own sin to bring down Abigail is complicated by Hale’s decision to visit everyone whose name is even remotely associated with the accusations of witchcraft. Hale wants to determine the character of each accused individual by measuring it against Christian standards. His invasion of the home space in the name of God reveals the essential nature of the trials—namely, to root out hidden sins and expose them. Any small deviation from doctrine is reason for suspicion. Proctor tries to prove the upright character of his home by reciting the Ten Commandments. In forgetting to name adultery, however, just as he “forgot” it during his affair with Abigail, he not only exposes the deficiency of his Christian morality but also suggests the possibility that his entire household has succumbed to the evil influence of the devil and witchcraft.

When Proctor asks indignantly why the accusers are always automatically innocent, he comments upon the essential attractiveness of taking the side of the accusers. Many of the accusations have come through the ritual confession of guilt—one confesses guilt and then proves one’s “innocence” by accusing others. The accusing side enjoys a privileged position of moral virtue from this standpoint. Proctor laments the lack of hard evidence, but, of course (as Danforth will later point out), in supernatural crimes, the standards of evidence are not as hard and fast. The only “proof” is the word of the alleged victims of witchcraft. Thus, to deny these victims’ charges is almost a denial of the existence of witchcraft itself—quite a heretical claim. Therefore, those who take the side of the accusers can enjoy the self-justifying mission of doing God’s will in rooting out the devil’s work, while those who challenge them are threatening the very foundations of Salem society.

Hale, meanwhile, is undergoing an internal crisis. He clearly enjoyed being called to Salem because it made him feel like an expert. His pleasure in the trials comes from his privileged position of authority with respect to defining the guilty and the innocent. However, his surprise at hearing of Rebecca’s arrest and the warrant for Elizabeth’s arrest reveals that Hale is no longer in control of the proceedings. Power has passed into the hands of others, and as the craze spreads, Hale begins to doubt its essential justice.

The desperate attempt by Giles, Proctor, and Francis to save their respective wives exposes the extent to which the trials have become about specific individuals and institutions struggling to maintain power and authority. Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne do not want to admit publicly that they were deceived by a bunch of young women and girls, while Parris does not want the trials to end as a fraud because the scandal of having a lying daughter and niece would end his career in Salem. Predictably, the judge and the deputy governor react to Proctor’s claims by accusing him of trying to undermine “the court,” which, in theocratic Salem, is tantamount to undermining God himself.

In order to dispose of Proctor’s threat, Danforth and Hathorne exercise their power to invade his privacy. Although Proctor has not yet been formally accused of witchcraft, Danforth and Hathorne, like Hale earlier, question him about his Christian morals as though he were already on trial. They hope to find in his character even the slightest deviation from Christian doctrine because they would then be able to cast him as an enemy of religion. Once thus labeled, Proctor would have virtually no chance of anyone in God-fearing Salem intervening on his behalf.

The reaction of Danforth and Hathorne to the deposition signed by ninety-one land-owning citizens further demonstrates the power of the court to invade the private lives of citizens, and indicates the extent to which the court believes in guilt by association. In the witch trials, guilt need not be proven by hard evidence, and signing a deposition attesting to the good character of the accused is enough to put oneself under the same suspicion of guilt. Over the protests of Francis, Danforth states that the signers should have nothing to worry about if they are innocent. The desire for privacy becomes an automatic sign of guilt. Revealingly, Parris states that the goal of the trials is to find precisely what is not seen—in both the supernatural realm and the realm of people’s private lives.

During a bout of hysteria such as the witch trials, authority and power fall to those who can avoid questioning while forcing others to speak. By virtue of their rank, Danforth and Hathorne have the authority to cast any questions put to them as an attack on the court. Similarly, Abigail responds to Proctor’s charges of harlotry with a refusal to answer questions. Although Danforth’s patience with her presumptuous manner is limited, the fact that a young girl can so indignantly refuse to answer a direct question from a court official indicates that she possesses an unusual level of authority for her age and gender.

Much of Act III has to do with determining who will define innocence and guilt. Proctor makes one desperate bid for this authority by finally overcoming his desire to protect his good name, exposing his own secret sin. He hopes to replace his wife’s alleged guilt with his own guilt and bring down Abigail in the process. Unfortunately, he mistakes the proceedings for an actual search for the guilty, when, in fact, the proceedings are better described as a power struggle. He exposes his private life to scrutiny, hoping to gain some authority, but he does not realize that too many influential people have invested energy into the proceedings for him to be able to stop them now. Too many reputations are at stake, and Proctor’s revelation comes too late to stop the avalanche.

Months have passed, and things are falling apart in Massachusetts, making Danforth and Hathorne increasingly insecure. They do not want to, and ultimately cannot, admit that they made a mistake in signing the death warrants of the nineteen convicted, so they hope for confessions from the remaining prisoners to insulate them from accusations of mistaken verdicts. Danforth cannot pardon the prisoners, despite Hale’s pleas and his obvious doubts about their guilt, because he does not want to “cast doubt” on the justification of the hangings of the twelve previously condemned and on the sentence of hanging for the seven remaining prisoners. In the twisted logic of the court, it would not be “fair” to the twelve already hanged if the seven remaining prisoners were pardoned. Danforth prioritizes a bizarre, abstract notion of equality over the tangible reality of potential innocence.

Clearly, the most important issue for the officials of the court is the preservation of their reputations and the integrity of the court. As a theocratic institution, the court represents divine, as well as secular, justice. To admit to twelve mistaken hangings would be to question divine justice and the very foundations of the state and of human life. The integrity of the court would be shattered, and the reputations of court officials would fall with it. Danforth and Hathorne would rather preserve the appearance of justice than threaten the religious and political order of Salem.

Danforth and Hathorne’s treatment of Proctor reveals an obsessive need to preserve the appearance of order and justify their actions as well as a hypocritical attitude about honesty. They want Proctor to sign a confession that admits his own status as a witch, testifies to the effect that he saw the other six prisoners in the company of the devil, and completely corroborates the court’s findings. While they seek to take advantage of Proctor’s reputation for honesty in order to support their claims of having conducted themselves justly, Danforth and Hathorne are wholly unwilling to believe Proctor when he says that he has conducted himself justly.

Proctor’s refusal to take part in the ritual transfer of guilt that has dominated the play—the naming of other “witches”—separates him from the rest of the accused. His unwillingness to sign his name to the confession results in part from his desire not to dishonor his fellow prisoners’ decisions to stand firm. More important, however, Proctor fixates on his name and on how it will be destroyed if he signs the confession. Proctor’s desire to preserve his good name earlier keeps him from testifying against Abigail, leading to disastrous consequences. Now, however, he has finally come to a true understanding of what a good reputation means, and his defense of his name, in the form of not signing the confession, enables him to muster the courage to die heroically. His goodness and honesty, lost during his affair with Abigail, are recovered.